

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1690

INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 22032

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJ: COUP RUMORS

REF: A) STATE 186592, B) BANGKOK A-117, C) DAO BANGKOK IR

6 895 0304, D) 75 BANGKOK 368, E) BANGKOK 176,

F) 75 BANGKOK A-286

SUMMARY: EMBASSY UNAWARE OF ANY COUP RUMOR SIGNIFICANT
ENOUGH TO REPORT. EMBASSY VIEW OF POLITICAL
MACHINATIONS OF ROYAL THAI ARMED FORCES REMAIN AS REPORTED
IN REF B. END SUMMARY.

1. THE EMBASSY IS SURPRISED AT DEPARTMENT'S REACTION TO
THE LEWIS SIMONS ARTICLE (REF A). RUMORS OF COUP PLOTTING
OCCUR CONSTATNTLY IN THAILAND BUT MOST ARE OF LITTLE
OR NO SUBSTANCE. SINCE THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS, THERE
HAVE BEEN A FEW RUMORS BUT NONE SIGNIFICANT ENOUGH FOR
THE EMBASSY TO REPORT.

2. THE EMBASSY'S VIEW OF THE POLITICAL MACHINATIONS
OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMED FORCES REMAINS BASIC-
ALLY AS REPORTED IN REF B. THE THAI MILITARY CONTINUE TO BE
SOMEWHAT FACTIONALIZED AND WITHOUT A CHARISMATIC LEADER.
THE MILITARY CONTINUE TO HOLD A GENERAL ATTITUDE OF
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GRUDGING ACCEPTANCE OF THE THAI DEOMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT.

THERE IS A LACK OF CONFIDENCE AMONG THE MILITARY THAT A COUP AT THIS TIME WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL AND NOT BE TOO BLOODY.

3. THE FOLLOWING ANSWERS ARE KEYED TO THE QUESTIONS ASKED IN PARA TWO OF REF A.

A. POWER HAS NOT GRAVITATED TO ONE PERSON OR ONE GROUP SINCE THE DEATH OF GENERAL KRIT AND THE REASSIGNMENT OF PRAMAN. THE ARMY REMAINS THE BASE OF POWER WITHIN THE MILITARY. NEITHER THE NAVY NOR THE AIR FORCE ALONE OR IN TANDEM COULD STAGE A COUP WITHOUT ARMY SUPPORT. THOSE WHO OWED THEIR ALLEGIANCE TO KRIT ARE REASSESSING THE SITUATION. THE ARMY ATTACHE REPORTED IN REF C THAT ROYAL THAI ARMY OFFICERS HAVE TURNED TO "CLASSMATE" ASSOCIATIONS TO FILL THIS LEADERSHIP VACUUM CAUSED BY KRIT'S DEATH. ACCORDING TO THE ARMY ATTACHE THE LEADING CONTENDERS OUTSIDE THE RTA ARE PRAMAN, GEN. THAWIT SENIWONG, MINISTER OF DEFENSE, AND POSSIBLY ADMIRAL SA-NGAD CHALOYU. THOSE WITHIN THE RTA RE GEN. CHALAT HIRANYASIRI, SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE; GEN. PRASOET THAMMASIRI, ASSISTANT COMMANDER IN CHIEF, RTA; AND LTG WITHUN YASAWAT, ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF FOR PERSONNEL, RTA. NONE HOWEVER, HAS THE NECESSARY TROOP SUPPORT OR HAS HAD THE TIME TO FILL THE VACUUM AT THIS TIME.

B. THE EMBASSY HAS NO SOLID EVIDENCE THAT THE MILITARY HAVE TAKEN ANY CONCERTED ACTIONS TO SABOTAGE THE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S EFFORTS TO REACH RAPPROACHMENT WITH ITS NEIGHBORS. THE DAO HAS DETERMINED THAT REPORTS OF THAI DEFOLIATION MISSIONS WITHIN CAMBODIA WERE TOTALLY WITHOUT FOUNDATION. THE THAI MILITARY HAVE NEITHER THE HERBICIDES NOR THE DISPENSING EQUIPMENT NECESSARY TO CARRY OUT SUCH MISSIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND THE EMBASSY STRONGLY SUSPECTS THAT THE MILITARY ENCOURAGED THE POLICE TO CONDUCT THE WELL-PUBLICIZED DRAGNETS FOR VIETNAMESE NATIONALS IN BANGKOK JUST PRIOR TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S DEPARTURE FOR LAOS AND VIETNAM. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT SOME ELEMENTS IN THE MILITARY OFTEN CONDONE THE ACTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL COMMANDERS WHO SEND THEIR TROOPS INTO LAO OR CAMBODIAN TERRITORY.

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C. THE U.S. MILITARY WITHDRAWAL AND THE RECENT INSURGENT ATTACKS HAVE GIVEN SOME MILITARY OFFICERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO CRITICIZE THE GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN POLICY MORE ACTIVELY BUT THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THESE TWO OCCURRENCES HAVE TENDED TO UNITE THE MILITARY IN OPPOSING THE POLICIES OF THE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. THERE IS A GENERAL AGREEMENT WITHIN THE MILITARY WITH THE BASIC TENENTS OF THAI FOREIGN POLICY. WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT MANY MILITARY OFFICERS HAVE TOLD THE

ATTACHES AND EMBOFFS IN PRIVATE THAT THEY DISAGREE WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY OF TOTAL PULLOUT OF U.S. FORCES FROM THAILAND, IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT NONE OF THE LEADING MILITARY OFFICES WAS WILLING TO SPEAK ON THE RECORD, ESPECIALLY BEFORE MARCH 20, TO URGE THE GOVERNMENT TO REACH A DIFFERENT DECISION. IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT SOME MILITARY OFFICERS DO NOT AGREE WITH THE SWIFTNESS WITH WHICH THAILAND IS REESTABLISHING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE NEIGHBORING COMMUNIST COUNTRIES, BUT IT IS EQUALLY TRUE THAT THERE IS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT RAPPROACHMENT WITH THEM IS NECESSARY FOR NATIONAL SURVIVAL.

D. THE THAI MILITARY OR ELEMENTS WITHIN THE THAI MILITARY ARE AS CAPABLE OF MOUNTING A COUP, AS ANY MILITARY IN THE WORLD. HOWEVER FOR THE REASONS STATED IN PARAGRAPH TWO AND IN REFS B, C, D, E, AND F, THE EMBASSY DOES NOT EXPECT A COUP, ESPECIALLY A SUCCESSFUL COUP, TO TAKE PLACE IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. IF THE GOVERNMENT WERE TO FALL SUDDENLY, SERIOUS CIVIL DISTURBANCES BREAK OUT, AND A PROLONGED PARLIAMENTARY CRISIS PARALYZE THE GOVERNMENT, THE COMMANDERS IN CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES, ADMIRAL SA-NGAT CHALOYU, AIR CHIEF MARSHAL KAMON DECHATUNGKHA AND GENERAL BUNCHAI BAMRUNGPHONG COULD, ACTING IN CONCERT, AND WITH THE TACIT APPROVAL OF THE KING, LEAD A MILITARY TAKEOVER IN RESPONSE TO THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY. THE ARMED FORCES WOULD, UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, FOLLOW THEIR COMMANDER.

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